

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SECRETINFORMATION

January 26, 1972

ARMY review completed.

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Phil Odeen *PO*SUBJECT: Comparison of the 1972 MR 2 Build-up and  
Situation in Three Previous Years

A key unanswered question in MR 2 is whether or not the ARVN will have the resources to meet a major attack by the 320th NVA Division, which is moving toward the area.

OSD (Systems Analysis) has recently completed a good study (Tab A) comparing the present situation with earlier years and the dry season battles of Ben Het (1969), Dak Seang (1970), and Fire Support Base 6 (1971). The analysis shows that based on the air and helicopter support required for previous battles, the RVNAF should be able to handle the threat this year with only limited U. S. help. It shows that:

-- If the 320th is used to defend the trails in South Laos and is not committed to the MR 2 attacks, the relative NVA/ARVN force levels will be the same as in last year's battle for Fire Support Base 6 -- a position of rough equality. (See Table 1)

-- If the 320th is committed and if the ARVN reinforces, as now planned, with only two airborne and one infantry regiment, the enemy would have a strength advantage of about 1.5 to 1.0. However, six additional 23rd Division battalions and one of the two remaining general reserve brigades could be provided to raise the force ratio to favor friendly forces slightly.

-- The five ARVN artillery battalions under direct MR 2 control can provide more than double the artillery support used during the three previous MR 2 dry season defenses.

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OSD (Systems Analysis) has recently completed a good study (Tab A) comparing the present situation with earlier years and the dry season battles of Ben Het (1969), Dak Seang (1970), and Fire Support Base 6 (1971). The analysis shows that based on the air and helicopter support required for previous battles, the RVNAF should be able to handle the threat this year with only limited U. S. help. It shows that:

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-- The three VNAF helicopter squadrons (over 90 helicopters) now in the Highlands have three times the number of helicopters furnished in the Ben Het/Dakto battle of 1969 by the U.S. Army. U.S. support then consisted of an average of about 32 helicopters. In more recent battles, such as FSB 6 last year, the RVNAF has provided nearly all helicopter support.

-- Tactical air support in prior battles ranged from 240 per month during the FSB 6 battle last year to almost 2000 per month during the Dak Seang battle in 1970. Providing sorties at the highest level ever flown in MR 2 would require less than 15% of the current US/VNAF capability. The highest previous level of B-52 support would require 40% of current capability. (See Table 2)

In short, ARVN has the men and combat support to meet the projected threat especially in a defensive action on home terrain. In MR 2, ARVN is weak in command and control, planning and leadership -- the problems that plagued the Lam Son operations. Breakdowns in these areas could result in an ineffective use of the available forces that could permit enemy gains. However, the ARVN has forces available in adequate numbers to meet such a threat if it masters these problems.

Thus, we face real risks in MR 2 should the enemy launch a main force offensive, but the forces needed will be available to deal with it and should be effective if ARVN leadership is adequate. There is no reason for panic.

cc: John Negroponte  
Dick Kennedy

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SECRETTable 1BATTLES IN KONTUM/PLEIKU

	<u>1969</u> (Ben Het/Dak-To)	<u>1970</u> (Dak Seang)	<u>1971</u> (FSB 6)	<u>1972</u> (320th NVA)	
<u>Combat Bns</u>				<u>In</u> 25 <sup>a/</sup>	<u>Out</u> 25 <sup>a/</sup>
Friendly	20 (8 US)	16 (3 US)	25		
Enemy	19	18	26	38	26
Fr/En Ratio	1.1	.9	1.0	.7	1.0
<u>Combat Str (000)</u>					
Friendly	15.6	8.6	11.6	11.6	11.6
Enemy	5.8	5.5	8.7	13.5	8.7
Fr/En Ratio	2.7	1.5	1.3	.9	1.3
<u>Results</u>					
Enemy KIA	3241	1699	4526	-	-
Friendly KIA	330	708	577	-	-
En/Fr Ratio	9.8	2.4	7.8	-	-

a/ Assumes the two airborne brigades and a regiment of 23rd Division are moved to the battle area.

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SECRETTable 2TACTICAL AIR SUPPORT

	<u>1969</u> (Ben Het/Dakto)	<u>1970</u> Dak Seang)	<u>1971</u> (FSB-6)	<u>1971</u> (Lam Son-19)
<u>Tactical Air</u>				
Sorties				
Supporting Operation (Monthly Average)	1,020 Sorties	2,035 Sorties	240 Sorties	5,700 Sorties
% of Current Monthly Capability	6%	13%	2%	35%
<u>B-52</u>				
Sorties				
Supporting Operation (Monthly Average)	404 Sorties	90 Sorties	32 Sorties	906 Sorties
% of Current Monthly Capability	40%	9%	3%	91%

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**SECRET**BATTLE PROSPECTS IN THE MR 2 HIGHLANDS

Summary. Recent assessments indicate the strong possibility of an enemy offensive in MR 2 early in 1972. The enemy has historically mounted offensives in the highlands of MR 2 normally employing a 3 regiment force. The major difference in this year's enemy build-up in the deployment of the 320th Division to the B-3 front. This will substantially increase enemy capability. The critical factor in judging enemy intentions is the employment of the 320th NVA Division; its arrival from North Vietnam is imminent but there are two differing views on its likely employment.

- Strong Offensive. This view, strongly held by COMUSMACV, sees the 320th augmenting organic B-3 Front units in MR 2. This would lead to a  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 force ratio in favor of the enemy, the worst in the history of the Highlands but not as bad as the 2 or 3 to 1 faced by RVNAF during Lam Son 719.

- LOC Protection. Those holding this view believe the 320th will provide a reserve to protect the enemy logistic network in Cambodia and South Laos. This would release all of the organic units of the B-3 Front for action in MR 2 but the force ratio would be about the same as in last year's FSB6 attacks.

Despite the adverse ratio of forces if the 320th is employed, MR 2 units will be on defense in familiar home terrain, in contrast to RVNAF in Lam Son 719. Should it become necessary, the adverse ratios could be improved to about 1 to 1 by using more units from the ARVN 23rd Division or MR 3.

Analysis of support furnished during past enemy offensives reveals that combat support now available to MR 2 should be adequate:

- Of 13 ARVN artillery battalions available, the 5 under MR control would more than double the amount used at Ben Het/Dak To.

- The three VNAF helicopter squadrons now in the Highlands provide about 3 times the support furnished RVNAF during Ben Het/Dak To.

- Major engagements in MR 2 have never received more than 8% of the total US/VNAF tactical air sorties, and support equalling the highest level ever flown in MR 2 would require less than 15% of the current US/VNAF capability.

- In May-June 1969, Ben Het/Dak To received almost 25% of the B-52 sorties being flown in SEA. Support equivalent to that provided at Ben Het/Dak To would require 40% of the current capability.

Since last year's battle in MR 2 a new armored cavalry squadron has been activated and a VNAF gunship squadron transferred from MR 3. More recent RVNAF actions to counter the expected offensives include alerting two brigades of the general reserve for movement to MR 2 and replacement

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of the 23rd Division's commander.

Principal RVNAF shortcomings noted during the intense action at Lam Son were battlefield coordination and casualty replacement. After action reports from MR 2 cite the same deficiencies in addition to poor staff planning.

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Introduction. Recent assessments indicate the strong possibility of an enemy offensive in western MR 2 around mid-February 1972. Despite general agreement on the enemy capabilities in the area, there are some understandable differences among analysts as to his actual intentions. Moreover, RVNAF preparations and activity will influence not only the outcome but also the intended scope of the enemy's activity. This analysis discusses current enemy capabilities and intentions, the historical data on past enemy offensives in the Highlands, and RVNAF preparations to counter the expected offensives this year. Additional perspective is provided by comparing the scope of past and projected enemy offensives with Lam Son 719.

### Current Enemy Capability and Intentions

The OJCS/CIA recently updated last spring's assessment of enemy capabilities in RVN and noted that enemy preparations since then in the B-3 front (increased personnel and unit infiltration) give them an added capability to launch an offensive in the Highlands early in 1972. In addition, Hanoi's search for a dramatic (albeit temporary) tactical success might focus on this region, where RVNAF units are more dispersed and of poorer quality than those in MR 1.

Informal discussions with intelligence analysts from several agencies reveal considerable unanimity not only with regard to the capability assessment but also the enemy's probable scheme of maneuver -- a main thrust in Kontum province with supporting attacks in Pleiku and northern MR 1 to tie down ARVN forces there. To further restrict the RVNAF reinforcing capability, increased activity is also expected in MR 3 and the coastal provinces of northern MR 2 and southern MR 1. According to some analysts, the intelligence signals countrywide are more reminiscent of 1964 (heavy attacks in the Kontum area and northern MR 1, low level activity elsewhere) than 1968.

The principal difference in analysts' views of the current situation revolves around the intended use of the 320th NVA division whose arrival in the B-3 front is imminent and thus the probable intensity of this year's enemy offensive in the Highlands compared to those in the past.

- Strong Offensive. This view, strongly held by COMUSMACV, assumes employment of the 320th NVA division in the battle area and thus the largest enemy effort since TET 1968.

- LOC Protection. Those holding this view believe the 320th is to provide a reserve and protect the South Laos portion of the supply network, while the three regiments normally organic to the B-3 front conduct an offensive similar to the Ben Het/Dak To campaign in 1969.

In addition to the 320th Division, the B-3 front has apparently been augmented by up to a battalion of 122mm field guns (10-12 tubes). The significance of this added combat support to an enemy offensive, however,

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may be more psychological than real; the 122mm guns have a greater range than the ARVN 155mm howitzer (22km vs 15 km) but the 155 is more accurate and its projectile weight is nearly twice as large. Moreover, the 122mm gun is vulnerable to allied air strikes; it is 15% heavier than the 155mm and has only been sighted behind tracked vehicle movers.

Intelligence reports from the field show no distinct pattern and could support either view, depending on the analyst's interpretation. Since there has been no significant change in enemy capabilities over the past weeks, COMUSMACV's recent request for new authorities may simply reflect his growing conviction in the strong offensive interpretation.

The LOC protection view is primarily based on the importance of the expanded Ho Chi Minh Trail to the enemy and declining levels of US support to RVNAF:

- Elements of two B-3 regiments have been helping to expand and protect the routes through South Laos and northern Cambodia since mid-1970. Enemy sensitivity to RVNAF ground interdiction threats may have dictated the dispatch of the 320th to assume this mission. This would release organic B-3 units for action in the Highlands this year, leaving them the option to employ the additional division in 1973.

- Return of all B-3 units for a 1969 style activity upsurge would probably achieve the desired publicity this year, while next year would be more opportune for a major offensive. US combat support to RVNAF, already reduced over previous levels, will be essentially nil by 1973, and the 320th would have gained valuable familiarity with the terrain.

Historical Perspective. The highlands of MR 2 have been the scene of large scale enemy action for the past several years, usually beginning in late March/early April, peaking in May and subsiding in June after which enemy units retire to their sanctuaries across the border.

Enemy attacks in the eastern portion of MR 2 are smaller in scale and generally avoid major confrontation with friendly main force units. Enemy base areas supporting his coastal units are more vulnerable to friendly penetration, which restricts his ability to mass without detection in this area.

Battle Detail. The enemy opens these setpiece battles in the highlands with scattered attacks by fire which build to a crescendo and are followed by multi-battalion ground assaults against isolated GVN outposts. Normally two infantry regiments and the bulk of his artillery regiment attacks in Kontum, with one or two regiments and the rest of the artillery in Pleiku.

Since 1969 this two province area has been on a par with all of MR 3 in number of enemy ground attacks during the April-June period. Moreover, during this same period in 1971 friendly regular KIA there equalled the

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total for both MRs 3 and 4. A comparison of these past battles and projected force ratios for this year in the area (Table 1) shows:

- Employment of the 320th NVA Division is the key issue. 1/
- If the 320th is used in the enemy attack, friendly to enemy force ratios approach that for Lam Son 719 (.7 compared to .5).
- If the 320th is not used, force ratios will be about the same as last year (about 1 to 1).

Despite the adverse ratio of forces should the 320th be deployed, in contrast to Lam Son 719, the MR 2 forces will be on defense in their home territory. Moreover, the ratios above assume only the same reinforcement as last year. As discussed later in the RVNAF preparations section, it would be possible to provide enough reinforcement to raise the combat strength ratio to nearly 1 to 1, should that prove necessary.

TABLE 1  
BATTLES IN KONTUM/PLEIKU a/

	1969 (Ben Het/Dak To)	1970 (Dak Seang)	1971 (FSB 6)	1972 (320th NVA)		LAM SON 719 1971
<u>Combat Bns</u>				In	Out	
Friendly	20 (8 US)	16 (3 US)	25	25b/	25b/	20
Enemy	19	18	26	38	26	40
Fr/En Ratio	1.1	.9	1.0	.7	1.0	.5
<u>Combat Str (000)</u>						
Friendly	15.6	8.6	11.6	11.6	11.6	12.5
Enemy	5.8	5.5	8.7	13.5	8.7	27.1
Fr/En Ratio	2.7	1.5	1.3	.9	1.3	.5
Enemy Attk (per month)	72	72	24	-	-	N/A
<u>Results</u>						
Enemy KIA	3241	1699	4526	-	-	13642
Friendly KIA	330	708	577	-	-	1532
En/Fr Ratio	9.8	2.4	7.8	-	-	-
<u>GVN Control (%)</u>						
Before Battle	34	52	50	60(Nov 71)	-	-
After Battle	27	48	50	-	-	-

a/ Data is for the entire two province area during the course of the battle. KIA results are operational (OPREP) figures, not final verified casualties.

b/ Assumes the 2 airborne brigades and a regiment of 23rd Division are moved to the battle area.

1/ Although there are some tentative indications that the 271st Regiment may also be destined for the B-3 Front, it was not included in our assessment, because the sketchy intelligence information available indicates that the 271st currently consists of only one battalion, and this would not materially affect either the calculations or outcome.

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Artillery and Helicopter Support. Since much of the enemy KIA in these battles is credited to artillery and air we examined available data to determine the scope of such support in the past and the impact of US redeployments.

US forces furnished all of the helicopter support and most of the artillery and TAC AIR support for the 1969 Ben Het/Dat To Campaign.

- Two battalions (36 tubes) of light and medium artillery augmented by a composite heavy (175/8") battery (5 tubes). All of the heavy artillery and half of the light/medium tubes were US.

- US Army Aviation units provided 32 helicopters (6 gunships, 20 utility, 6 heavy) per day. In sharp contrast, more than 20 times that number (659) were used on IAM SON 719.

By the time of the FSB6 attack in 1971, US artillery in MR 2 had been reduced about 2/3 (to 5 bns). A medium (155mm) and heavy (175/8") battalion were in Pleiku but were not employed in the actual battle area. According to the commander of the VNAF 2d Air Division,\* his division furnished all of the air support in the actual area of operations (2 helicopter squadrons, 2 fighter squadrons, and a liaison squadron).

Based on the above, RVNAF seems to have adequate combat support available in MR 2 for the predicted enemy offensive even though all US artillery has been withdrawn and US helicopters have been reduced:

- Of the 13 ARVN artillery battalions, the 5 under MR control would more than double those employed in the Ben Het/Dak To battle.

- Although ARVN does not have heavy (175mm/8") artillery in MR 2, available US heavy artillery was not actually used in the battle area during the FSB6 battle last year, although it was used during Ben Het/Dak To.

- VNAF in MR 2 has three of its four UH-1 helicopter squadrons (31 helicopters each) stationed in Pleiku, giving them about 3 times the number provided in support of the Ben Het/Dak To battle.

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Tactical Air and B-52 Support

Tactical air sorties have not been used extensively in Kontum and Pleiku provinces. Even in the months characterized by major battles, no more than 8% of the total U.S. and VNAF sorties in Southeast Asia (and 17% of all those flown in South Vietnam) were flown in support of operations in the two provinces. This is in contrast to the air effort devoted to IAM SON 719 which, during February and March 1971, received about 30% of all tactical air sorties flown in SEA and over 50% of those flown in South Laos.

The level of B-52 effort supporting the significant engagements in Kontum and Pleiku provinces has never exceeded 25% of the total sorties flown during the period of the battles. However, during the time IAM SON 719 was in progress over 80% of all B-52 sorties flown (and 90% of those flown in Laos) were in support of the operation.

The table below shows the level of tactical air and B-52 effort supporting the major engagements in Kontum and Pleiku during 1969-1971, as well as the levels during IAM SON 719. Sorties flown in conjunction with these operations are compared with the air activity in the remainder of SEA during the times the operations were in progress, and with the capability now available.

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US/VNAF AIR OPERATIONS IN KONTUM AND PLEIKU a/

	<u>Ben Het/Dak To</u> <u>May-June 1969</u>	<u>Dak Seang</u> <u>Apr-May 70</u>	<u>FSB6</u> <u>Apr-June 71</u>	<u>LAM SON 719</u> <u>Feb-Mar 71</u>
<u>Tactical Air b/</u>				
Sorties supporting battle (monthly avg.)	2,037 (1,019)	2,577 (2,035)	721 (240)	8,512 (5,674)
Sorties in all SVN	37,154	15,519	12,675	16,063 c/
Total SEA Sorties	60,707	32,343	46,846	29,824
% of SVN total for battle	5	17	6	53 c/
% of SEA total for battle	3	8	2	29
% of current monthly capability	6	13	2	35
<u>B-52</u>				
Sorties supporting operation (monthly avg.)	804 (402)	114 (90)	96 (32)	1,358 (906)
Sorties in all SVN	3,019	1,015	791	1,485 c/
Total SEA sorties	3,544	1,778	3,425	1,664
% of SVN sorties for battle	27	11	12	91 c/
% of SEA sorties for battle	23	6	3	82
% of current monthly capability	40	9	3	91

- a/ Sortie data for Ben Het/Dak To and Dak Seang from USAF reports of air support for the operations. Data for FSB6 include all sorties in Kontum and Pleiku provinces. LAM SON 719 data from USAF report of COMMANDO HUNT V.
- b/ Includes gunship sorties.
- c/ Sorties in South Laos for LAM SON 719.

CURRENT US/VNAF AIR CAPABILITIES

<u>Tactical Air</u>	(sorties/Month)
US	10,000
(Air Force)	(6,700)
(Navy)	(3,300)
VNAF	6,500
<u>Gunship</u>	
US	750
VNAF	800
<u>B-52</u>	1,000

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Through June 1972 Air Force aircraft based in South Vietnam and Thailand will have the capability to fly 6,700 tactical air sorties, 750 gunship sorties and 1,000 B-52 sorties each month. Navy aircraft will add an additional 3,300 sorties monthly to the tactical air total. The VNAF have been programmed to fly 6,500 tactical air and 800 gunship sorties monthly; however, their contribution will probably not be more than 5,000 tactical air sorties and 500 gunship sorties each month. Thus, about 15,000 tactical air 1,250 gunship and 1,000 B-52 sorties should be available each month until June 1972 (this does not include monthly totals of 3,000-3,500 T-28 and 200 gunship sorties flown by the Lao).

As can be seen in the above table, engagements of a magnitude similar to Ben Het, Dak Seang and FSB 6 would not require significant portions of the current US/VNAF tactical air monthly sortie capability. To fly the level of B-52 support flown during Ben Het would require 40% of the current B-52 capability. B-52 support equivalent to that at Dak Seang and FSB 6 would require 9% and 3%, respectively, of the current sortie level.\*

As noted previously one squadron of A-1s (24 aircraft) are at Pleiku. A squadron of A-37s (24 aircraft) is at Nha Trang. To fly the level of tactical air support flown during Ben Het would require the sortie capability of one A-37 or two A-1 squadrons. Twice that number of aircraft would have to be used to support an operation of the magnitude of Dak Seang. B-52 support as used at Ben Het would require approximately 18 aircraft; support as used at Dak Seang, 4 B-52s and FSB 6, less than 2 B-52s.

RVNAF Shortcomings. In LAM SON 719, battlefield coordination and casualty replacement were considered the principal RVNAF shortcomings. In addition, a series of MR 2 RVNAF performance assessments during periodically intense combat since 1969 shows a consistent set of deficiencies. The previous MR 2 senior advisor noted in his final report that "shortcomings which existed at Dak Seang (1970) were also present to a lesser extent at FSB 6 (1971)." Among those cited were:

- Command and Control. Failure to quickly establish a forward command post when the operation is large and involves units from several organizations.

- Planning. MR 2 has neither a campaign nor a seasonal plan. Although MG Dzu moves forces quickly to the scene of action, there is no accompanying scheme of maneuver, chain of command, or fire support plan.

- Coordination. Coordination of intelligence, aviation, artillery, and Tac air was poor.

- Personnel and Unit Management. Casualty reports were not timely or accurate and there was little or no attempt to establish a priority system for casualty replacement. Moreover, units were often rotated in and out of the battle area without regard to their performance potential or casualties taken.

\*While not germane to the current build-up in MR 2, air support of an operation of the magnitude of LAM SON 719 would require 35% of current US/VNAF tactical air and 91% of the current B-52 capability. Since the period of LAM SON 719 combined US/VNAF tactical air capability has decreased less than 10%; however, since early 1970 the decrease has been over 30%. B-52 capability is down 10% from a year ago and down 30% from early 1970.

**SECRET**Current RVNAF Preparations

In addition to the two ROK divisions (18 bns) along the central coast of MR 2, there are 35 RVNAF maneuver battalions operating generally as follows:

- The 22d Division (17 bns) has two regiments operating in the threatened northern Highlands (Kontum and Pleiku) and two in the perennially troublesome Binh Dinh area.

- The 23d Division (13 bns) has its three regiments operating over a wide area from Binh Thuan on the southern coast to Darlac in the highlands south of Pleiku.

- MR forces (5 bns) include a 3 battalion ranger group and a 2 squadron armored cavalry brigade now operating around Pleiku.

The OJCS RVN assessment (January update) cited measures taken to strengthen MR 2 since last May--an armored cavalry squadron activated and a VNAF gunship squadron transferred from MR 3. More recent actions include:

- Two airborne brigades (3 bns each) withdrawn from Cambodia and alerted for movement to MR 2, leaving 2 brigades (1 Abn, 1 Marine) as JGS general reserve in MR 3.

- Replacement of the 23rd Division commander by the deputy MR commander and new province chiefs in Binh Dinh, Darlac, and Quang Duc.

While it seems strange that the 22nd Division commander, whom COMUSMACV rates incompetent, was not relieved, it is probable that the MR commander (MG Dzu) will personally direct operations in the northern highlands as he did in last year's FSB 6 attacks. Thus having his former deputy in command of the other division might facilitate rapid movement of reinforcements to the battle area from the 23rd Division.

In past years, MR 2 commanders have reinforced the highlands with regiments from either the 23rd Division or the Binh Dinh area. The present MR 2, senior advisor has stated, however, that the two regiments now in Binh Dinh would remain there to preclude the usual GVN control losses in Binh Dinh which have accompanied this turbulence.

In addition to the 6 airborne battalions then, 6-8 battalions could be provided from the 23rd Division. Depending on the situation in MR 3 and MR 1, one of the two remaining general reserve brigades might also be made available, since the JGS has alerted a reinforced regiment in MR 4 for possible movement to MR 3.

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